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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000449

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad, who hosted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Damascus yesterday, as saying that Syria was preparing for Israeli aggression. Israel Hayom bannered: QConcern about the Strengthening of the Tehran-Damascus Axis. Israel Radio reported that Ahmadinejad also met with Hizbullah

leader Hassan Nasrallah and the leaders of the radical Palestinian groups. The radio reported that a trilateral Ahmadinejad-Assad-Nasrallah meeting took place; the radio cited the BBC as saying that the summit was not immediately announced because of Nasrallah's concern for his personal security. While Israel's President Peres called on Assad to choose between the axis of peace and the axis of evil, Assad emphasized the special relations between Damascus and Tehran. Ahmadinejad said he would advance a vision of a new Middle East with "no Zionists and no colonialists." (IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi said yesterday that Israel has no interest in a regional escalation.) Assad defied U.S. calls to curb ties with Iran, saying his long-standing alliance with Tehran remains strong despite overtures from Washington intended to shift his loyalties. With Ahmadinejad by his side, Assad told America not to dictate relationships in the Middle East. "I find it strange how they talk about Middle East stability and at the same time talk about dividing two countries," Assad told reporters when asked about Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's call on Wednesday for Syria to move away from Iran. Taking a further swipe at Clinton, he said that perhaps he and Ahmadinejad had misunderstood, due to a translation error or their own limited understanding. The Jerusalem Post notes that Jerusalem is not commenting over the Damascus summit meeting.

Leading media reported that DM Ehud Barak's statement in Washington that Qstrong and crippling sanctionsQ must be applied to Iran clashes with the approach formulated yesterday by Assistant Secretary of State Philip J. Crowley in the State Department's daily briefing.

PM Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted as saying in a joint interview with Israel Radio and the Russian-language Channel 9-TV that he had been misunderstood, as his cabinet's decision to restore the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb only meant physical preservation of the sites and in no way a change of the status quo. Netanyahu insisted on Israel's determination to respect the Muslims' religious freedom. HaQaretz reported that the PM's Office did not consult with intelligence or law-enforcement officials over the security implications involved in including Hebron's site on the list of national heritage sites slated for preservation. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, Environment Minister Gilad Erdan (Likud) bashed the State Department's condemnation of Israel's move.

(Media quoted Assistant Secretary of State Philip J. Crowley as saying yesterday: "We have asked both parties to refrain from provocative and unilateral actions that undermine efforts to resume negotiations to end the conflict," adding: "We have raised this directly with the Israeli Government.") Erdan said that the U.S. was misled on the issue. Israel Radio also cited condemnation of the GOI's decision by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which demanded that the U.N. Security Council debate the issue, and by the Quartet, which called Israel's decision an act of aggression and provocation toward Muslims. The media reported that yesterday the IDF and Palestinians clashed in Hebron for the fourth day.

HaQaretz reported that, in a paper released yesterday, the PA has warned that it may abandon its support of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which outlines a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel, and instead pursue the creation of a binational state between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea. The document, entitled "The Political Situation in Light of Developments with the U.S. Administration and Israeli Government and Hamas's Continued Coup d'Etat," was drafted in December 2009 by Saeb Erekat, the PA's veteran chief negotiator.

Israel Radio quoted the Nazareth newspaper Hadith a-Nas as saying, based on an Arab diplomat, that U.S. Special Envoy to Middle East Peace Senator George Mitchell recently threatened to resign over the failure to resume Israeli-Palestinian talks. Israel Radio also cited Hadith a-Nas as saying that the White House declined Mitchell's request. A Palestinian source told the Arabic-language newspaper that Mitchell had also wished to resign over the intervention of State Department officials favorable to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the rightist yeshiva organization Ateret Cohanim is moving more Jewish families into Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter.

HaQaretz reported that the passport photographs of the agents who assassinated Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai were doctored so the agents would not be identified. The discovery casts doubt on claims that

the espionage agency that carried out last month's hit on the senior Hamas operative committed grave errors.

Yediot (Smadar Perry) reported that Israel neglects its relations with Egypt.

Yediot reported that 19 of the 35 delegates who spoke about the Goldstone Report at the European Parliament yesterday criticized it.

The Jerusalem Post reported that more than 90 U.S. Congress members signed a letter to Secretary Clinton supporting Israel ahead of today's U.N. General Assembly vote on a resolution that would give Israel and the Palestinians five more months to investigate their actions during Operation Cast Lead.

Citing the AP, Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted the European Union's high court as saying yesterday that the West Bank is not part of Israel and that Israeli goods made there are subject to E.U. import taxes.

The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a Gallup poll that found that Israel enjoys near record support in the U.S. However, only 30 percent of those polled foresee a time when Israel and the Arabs will live in peace.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. The Master of Pyromania

Senior columnist and longtime peace advocate Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/26): "It's not clear what it is about Benjamin Netanyahu, who in both his terms as prime minister has gotten into trouble -- or to be more precise, has gotten the country embroiled in incendiary issues. During his first term he triggered bloody riots all over the country as a result of opening the Western Wall tunnel (the Rock of our existence). Now he has decided, under pressure from the right-wing forces in his government, to add the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb to the list of Jewish heritage preservation sites, thus enabling Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, who was in Europe at the time, to warn that Israel is threatening to ignite a religious war.... The Labor Party is being dragged into an ultra-Orthodox religious right-wing whirlpool, the likes of which we haven't seen since the establishment of the state. The partnership between Barak and Bibi is causing an upheaval in the Israeli way of life. We have returned to the days of the entire world is against us." Instead of being preoccupied with the important matters, we are preoccupied with things that lead nowhere. We are scattering lit matches that are starting fires that damage Israel's international standing, both on the Iranian issue and on peace issues. Bibi has remained the same Bibi, the master of pyromania.

II. Bibi's Heritage

Diplomatic correspondent and television anchor Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/26): "Netanyahu and Barak, the two decorated and experienced generals, were supposed to lead us to safe shores. What came of all this? If there were negotiations with the Syrians now, Ahmadinejad would not be in Damascus. The threat of war with Syria would be removed, at least temporarily. If there were any kind of negotiations with the Palestinians now, there would not be riots in Hebron. Our situation around the world would also be better. Iran could be isolated, the danger posed by Hizbullah and Hamas in advance of the sanctions could be neutralized, and everything could be made simpler. All these things are now needed like a breath of oxygen. In order to deal with Iran, the Americans need quiet, room to maneuver, and a calm Middle East. Instead, they get from Netanyahu and Barak an agitated and irresponsible country, which cannot speak to any of its enemies, cannot maintain reasonable ties with its neighbors, and does not reward its allies -- and in the middle of all this is also caught at high noon, allegedly of course, in Dubai, with the forged

passports and its pants down. Instead of us being in the gallery, waving at the dock, we are sitting on it, reprimanded, enabling Iran and its allies to look like stable elements. For the time being, this is our heritage.

III. QThe Prime Minister as Marketing Director

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/26): QIndeed, [Benjamin Netanyahu planned] weighty, breathtaking, and historical decisions, which would dramatically change the face of the State of Israel and turn it into an economic, scientific, technological, and cultural world power. This is according to a prime minister who in his second term is playing the part of a marketing director rather than a state leader. His QreformsQ so far are suitable for the desk of a mid-level official in a mid-level ministry. Prime Minister Netanyahu appears to be so bored with his high position that he finds time to deal with nonsense; nonsense from the viewpoint of the tasks usually imposed on a statesman chosen to lead Israel. And the public is forgiving (it is still forgiving; however, there are growing signs of discomfort, disappointment and impatience), because sometimes the public prefers not to confront inconvenient truths and is willing for some time to live in an imaginary reality, painted by our prime minister in rosy colors.

IV. QThe Plot Thickens

HaQaretz editorialized (2/26): QThe group that took out Mabhouh was exposed due to one weak point: the use of false passports from Western countries bearing the identities of real Israelis with dual citizenship. From now on all Israelis with dual passports will be suspected of being intelligence agents. There is no doubt that this revelation endangers, or at least complicates, other operations. Did Mabhouh's assassination justify taking such a risk? Was there negligence or contempt for the adversary on the part of the planners, the commanders and those who approved the operation (Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to foreign reports)? Were other operations compromised, that were even more essential than the killing of a Hamas weapons smuggler? Is criticism by countries whose passports were falsified just for the record, or will it limit operatives' freedom of action in other hits? Will the affair increase Israel's international isolation and present it once again as a lawless state? If foreign reports are true about Israel's responsibility for the Mabhouh hit and the forged passports, then a thorough clarification is warranted, which can lead to conclusions about both organizations and individuals.

V. QThe International Chorus at Abu MazenQs Service

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (2/26): Q[U.N.] Secretary-General Ban Ki-moonQs unusual pronouncement [condemning IsraelQs list of heritage sites] was accompanied by criticism from the United States. During most of last week Palestinian Authority head Abu Mazen conducted an impressive lecture tour of Europe on account of the Cave of the Patriarchs.... A complaint by Arabs -- especially by those called Palestinians -- against Israel is immediately adopted by the Qinternational community,Q even if their claim is ludicrous. The Belgian Parliament, the U.N. General Assembly, and television stations avidly take in any anti-Israeli statement: even an Israeli TV anchor felt the need to justify herself and anxiously wonder what will happen to us.... Only 10 years ago the PLO begged for international legitimacy and the Jews volunteered to grant it in exchange for the cessation of terrorism. It is now the PLO that automatically activates Qpublic opinion,Q cutting IsraelQs oxygen supply of legitimacy and legality.

VI. QPurimQs Moral Clarity

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/26): Q[Mahmoud al-]Mabhouh, a self-confessed killer ... who facilitated the smuggling of thousands of Iranian-made missiles into Gaza to be used against Israeli citizens, did not appear on InterpolQs list and traveled freely. Nor is it likely that the International Criminal Court or the U.N. Human Rights Council would have been willing to take action against Mabhouh for violating IsraelisQ basic human rights by trying to destroy them. But Dubai, in its clamor for the arrest of MabhouhQs Qmurderers,Q is receiving European support.

Similarly, IDF officers who defend their country against Palestinian terrorism are liable to be arrested and charged for war crimes when traveling to Europe, while members of Hamas and of Fatah terror cells can often move unhindered from country to country. Fuzzy moral relativism is ravaging Europe and reversing long-accepted notions of truth and falsehood.... The book of Esther, the centerpiece of the Purim holiday, might seem like a fairytale, but it is a quintessentially political book from which the Europeans and the Australians could learn. Adrift in a sea of multiculturalism -- Ahasuerus ruled 120 nations from India to Kush [possibly an area in northeastern Africa] -- the Jewish people overcame their enemy by maintaining a distinctive identity and culture which fostered unity.

In a similar vein, Europeans, who are fighting a war of ideas, must strengthen their ties with their own culture and the values it represents if they are to resist the culture of destruction emblemized by Hamas, al-Qaida and other representatives of radical Islam, the avowed enemies of everything that is most admirable about the West.

CUNNINGHAM